

THE SECRET OF FAILURE

NO. 2454

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 1, 1896
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON
ON THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 25, 1886

*“Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?
And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you,
If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain,
Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.
Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”
Matthew 17:19-21*

*“And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out?
And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.”
Mark 9:28-29*

I PUT these two texts together for this reason. Those of you who are acquainted with the Revised Version know that the twenty-first verse in the seventeenth chapter of Matthew is left out. There seems to be little doubt that it was inserted in certain copies by persons who thought that it ought to be there because it was in Mark's narrative. It is put in the margin of the Revised Version, but it is left out of the text. It is, therefore, very satisfactory to find that the omission from Matthew's account makes no real difference because we have the words in the twenty-ninth verse of the ninth of Mark, “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.”

Only there is this fact to be noticed, in the Revised Version this verse runs, according to Mark, “This kind can come out by nothing, save by prayer.” Whether the fasting was originally there, or not, I cannot tell, but putting together the two accounts in Matthew and Mark, we believe we have a full and true report of what the Master did actually say on this occasion.

I. Observe then, dear friends, at the outset, without any further preface, that WE MAY BE THE SERVANTS OF GOD, AND YET WE MAY OCCASIONALLY BE DEFEATED.

Those nine disciples, who remained at the foot of the mountain when the Savior took the other three to behold His transfiguration had each of them a true commission from the Lord Jesus Christ. They were nine of His chosen apostles. He had elected them in His own good pleasure, and there was no doubt about their being really called to the apostleship. They were not only elected, but they were also qualified, for on former occasions they had healed the sick, they had cast out devils, and they had preached the Word of Christ with great power.

Upon them rested miraculous influences, and they were able to do great wonders in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they were not only qualified to do this, but they had actually performed many marvels of healing. When they went forth, girded with divine power, they healed the sick, and cast out devils everywhere, yet on this occasion you perceive that they were completely baffled and beaten. A poor father had brought to them his epileptic son, who was also possessed with an evil spirit, and they could neither cast out the evil spirit nor heal the epileptic boy.

They came, as it were, to a great difficulty which quite nonplussed them, and the scoffing scribes were there, ready enough to take advantage of them, and to say in scorn and contempt, “You cannot cure this child, for the power you have received from your Master is limited. He can do some strange things, but even He cannot do all things. Perhaps He has lost His former power, and now, at last, a kind of devil

has appeared that He cannot master. You see, you are mistaken in following Him, your faith has been fixed upon an impostor, and you had better give it up.”

Oh, how ready the evil spirit ever is to suggest dark thoughts if we cannot always be successful in our work of faith and labor of love! I believe that it was for this very reason that our Lord gave us this record of the defeat of the nine apostles in order to let us feel that it is not so great a wonder if, sometimes, we have to come back and say, “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” It is no new thing that we should be made a laughingstock to the enemies of the cross of Christ because we cannot even do what we have formerly done, and are beaten in the very field where aforetime we have achieved great and notable victories for our Master.

Brethren, why do you think that the Lord allows His servants to be beaten at all? Well, of course, the chief reason in this case was—and of that we will speak presently—because God gives the victory to faith, and if we will not believe, neither shall we be established. If we fall, as those disciples probably had fallen, into an unspiritual frame of mind and a low state of grace, our commission will not be worth much, our former qualifications will be of little value, and all successes we have had in earlier days will not take away the effect of present failures.

We shall be like Samson, who went out and shook himself as he had done aforetime, but the Spirit of God had departed from him, and the Philistines soon overcame him—those very Philistines whom, if his Lord had still been with him, he would have smitten hip and thigh with great slaughter. If we are to do the Lord’s work, and to do it successfully, we must have faith in Him, we must look beyond ourselves, we must look beyond our commission, we must look beyond our personal qualifications, we must look beyond our former successes, we must look for a present anointing by the Holy Spirit, and by faith, we must hang upon the living God from day to day.

Apart from that, however—which we will dwell upon directly—I think our Lord intends that we should often have something fresh come across our path *to keep us from getting into ruts*. It is a very bad thing for anyone when even the Christian life gets to be merely mechanical, you know what state of things that is, you may have come here to this service just as a matter of course, almost without thinking what you were doing.

I have known many persons, in the public worship of God, sing simply because the time for singing has come, and they frequently prove that they are singing only in a mechanical fashion, for they sit down before the hymn has come to an end, showing that they are not sufficiently interested to find out how it closes. So we may kneel apparently in prayer, and not really be praying, for the mind is gadding to and fro. The minister also can get into a way of preaching that is almost like a parrot repeating by rote what it has been taught to say.

This will not do, brothers and Sisters. The Lord will not have us always moving in ruts, so He does what men do sometimes in our roads when they put great blocks of timber to turn travelers off from one side of the road on to the other. In that way, this lunatic child was put right in the disciples’ road, so that they should not go on sleepily doing the same work without heart and without thought.

This strange case wakes them up, they have something to deal with now that is very different from that they have had before, it is not a common fever, or even an ordinary case of Satanic possession, but it is a dreadful demoniac who is now before them, foaming, and raging, and wallowing in their presence, and altogether beyond their power to heal. This wakes them up, and the Lord permits us sometimes to have trouble in the church, or a shock in the family, that we may wake right up, and not go on mechanically with no spiritual life in us.

Next, it was to make the disciples *see the infinite superiority of their Master*. Had he been there, there would have been no devil that would have nonplussed Him. Whatever needed to be accomplished, He spoke, and it was done. The soft utterance of His voice, the gentle uplifting of His hand, nay, the very glance of His eye, or the willing in His mind, was sufficient to work His marvelous cures. But the disciples had to come to Him and say, “We could not do it, we could not cast him out.” No, and it is the

same still, we cannot, but He can, wherefore, let us worship before the omnipotent Christ, to whom nothing is difficult, much less impossible,

Then they were driven to *wish for more of His company*. They were made to see that they could not do without Him. Soldiers, without their ever-victorious Captain, driven before the enemy, they now felt that their strength must lie in Him, and that they must keep close to Him, and entreat Him not to leave them again.

This experience also *drove them to Him in prayer*. They now need their Master, and they begin to cry to Him. "Why could we not cast him out?" was now their humiliating confession and inquiry, and there was, within the heart of their question, this earnest prayer, "O Master, help us to cast out devils again! Take not Your Spirit from us, but renew in us our former strength, and give us even more."

I am sure that anything that makes us often come back to our Lord, must be a blessing to us. It is very humiliating to have so long preached in vain, to have gone to that village so many times, and yet to see no conversions, to visit that lodging house so often, and apparently to have made no impression upon the careless inmates, or to have gone into that dark garret, and told the story of the cross, only to find that the hearer is just as dark, and possibly, just as brutal as ever.

It seems as if our hearts must break, when we are really in earnest, yet we cannot achieve the blessed purpose that we feel sure must be dear to the Savior's own heart, but it may be that our failure has much of divine instruction in it, and it may be the preface and preparation for future success that shall greatly honor the Lord Jesus Christ.

This was a part of the training of the twelve. They were at college now, with Christ as their Tutor. They were being prepared for those grand days, when they should do even greater things than He had done, because He had gone back to His Father, and had received still greater power, and had given it to them. "It is good for a man that he bears the yoke in his youth."

It is good for you, young brethren in college, when you go to your first pastorate, to get battered about, to have all manner of troubles, to go through fire and through water. It will make men of you, you will be all the grander and the better servants of God in after years, when your own weakness shall have driven you back upon the divine strength, and you shall have learned to trust, not in man, much less in yourself, but to cast yourself confidently on God.

II. The next thing to be learned from this narrative is that when Christ's servants do get baffled, they should make haste to their Master, and ask Him this question, which His disciples put to Him, "Why could not we cast him out?" That is to be our second division. WHEN WE ARE BAFFLED, THERE MUST BE A CAUSE, and it is well for us to try and find it out. We must go to the Master, and ask, "Why could not we cast him out?"

This inquiry, if it leads up to a correct answer, is evidently a very wise one, for *every man ought to try to know all he can about himself*. If I am successful, why is it that I succeed? Let me know the secret, that I may put the crown on the right head. If I do not succeed, let me know the reason why, that I may at any rate try to remove any impediment, if it is an impediment of my own making. If I am a vessel that is not fit for the Master's use, let me know why I am not fit, that I may, as much as lies in me, prepare myself for the great Master's service. I know that if I am fit to be used, He is sure to use me, and if He does not use me, it will most probably be because there is some unfitness in me. Try to know, brethren and sisters, why you get baffled in holy service, for it will be wise to know.

Probably, *it may tend very greatly to your humiliation*. It may make you go, with tears in your eyes, to the mercy seat. You may not yet know all that is in your own heart, there may be a something, which to you seems to be a very trifling affair, which is grieving your God, and weakening your spiritual power. It may seem to you to be a little thing, but in that little thing may lie the eggs of so much mischief that God will not tolerate it, and He will not bless you until you are altogether clear of it. It will be wise and right, therefore, even though it is to your sorrow and regret, that you should find the answer to the question, "Why could not we cast him out?"

For whatever may be the reason of your failure, *it may be cured*. In all probability, it is not a great matter, certainly not an insuperable difficulty to the Lord. By the grace of God, this hindrance may be taken away from you, and no longer be allowed to rob you of your power. Search it out, then, look with both your eyes, and search with the brightest light that you can borrow, that you may find out everything that restrains the Spirit of God, and injures your own usefulness.

I would at the present time earnestly put into the mouths of a great many people this question, “Why could not we cast him out?” Let the church of God get to the windows of her sanctuaries, and look out, and say, “Why do not these thousands of people come to hear the Gospel that we preach?” There is all the harlotry in our streets, why has not the church of God swept that away? The vilest sin is rampant—sin of which we dare not speak, it is so vile, how is it that we cannot cast this out? And all this social discord, this complaining and confusion, this aiming at the disruption of everything, what have we been doing that all this unrest has come? Why could we not cast these vile forces out?

Then, perhaps, in your family there is a son, and you cannot bring him even to respect religion. It is not so very long ago since you nursed him on your knee, you did not think then that he would live to be an opponent of the Christ in whom your soul delights. There are in your family certain evils that you pray against, and yet they remain there.

Father, you are responsible for your family, and you cannot get rid of your responsibility. Mother, much responsibility for your children’s characters must lie with you, if they are not what you would have them to be, oh, ask the question, “Why could not we cast the evils out of them?” That question each teacher may ask concerning his class, and each worker concerning his sphere of labor. I ask it concerning my hearers, when I remember some of them who have made a profession of religion, and then have foully fallen, and others who have backslidden into coldness or lukewarmness, and many who, after years of preaching, remain just the same as ever. What devil is this that has got into them? Why cannot we cast him out?

I will tell you another time when you may well ask this question, it is when you realize the evil that is within your own heart. There are certain sins there that have cost you much pain, and they are not yet cast out. In your life, they have no rightful place, in your heart of hearts, they have no welcome place, for you desire your heart to be clean before God. Still, those sins come. Perhaps, in your case, a hasty temper is the demon that takes possession of you, or possibly you have a spirit tending to despondency.

I do not know what your particular sins are, but do you not sometimes ask the question, “Why could not we cast them out?” We have got rid of some sins, “bag and baggage,” they never torment us now. It is long since we had a temptation to certain forms of sin, we sent them adrift in the name of the Lord, but there are certain others of these Diabolonians that hide away in dens and caves and corners, and we cannot rout them out.

Why could not we cast them out? It is a question that may be asked from so many quarters and so many points, and it ought to be pressed home. I have put it to you, but let each one’s own conscience get alone with Christ, and ask Him, “Why am I baffled and defeated? Why cannot I cast this evil out?”

III. Now, in the third place, consider OUR LORD’S ANSWER, upon which I cannot dwell very long because our time is short.

The first answer that the Lord Jesus gave to His disciples was, “Because of your unbelief.” He told them that their failure was due to *their lack of faith*. He did not say, “Because of the devil, and his peculiar character, and the strength of his entrenchment within the poor sufferer’s nature,” but He said, “Because of your unbelief.”

They might have said, and it would have been true, “This demon has been long in possession.” The father said that the affliction came upon him when he was a child. You know that it is not easy to turn out a devil that has lived in any place, say, for twenty years, he says, “I have been in possession three, seven, twenty-one years, and I am not going. Does not even the law of the land give me a right to remain after I have held undisputed possession so long? I am not going, and especially, I am not going for anything you say or do!”

So, the long duration of a sin makes it all the more difficult matter to deal with it. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.” It is a difficult thing to cast out evils of long standing, still, if we have faith, there will be no difficulty in overcoming even those sins that have held possession of the sinner for a great length of time.

Moreover, in this case, there was the strength of this devil as well as the length of his possession. He took this poor child, and threw him into the fire or into the water, and hurled him to and fro at his cruel and wicked pleasure. He did this even before the disciples’ eyes. Yes, but if they had had faith, they would have understood that, though Satan is strong, Christ is far stronger. The devil is mighty, but God is almighty. If the disciples had only believed, they might have overcome the demon by the power of Christ.

In addition to the length and the strength of this possession, there was a tremendous fury shown by this evil spirit. The child was not simply vexed as in ordinary cases of epilepsy, but he was tremendously tossed and torn, and I think there was in this case a feature of sullenness also, it was apparently so, at any rate, for it was a dumb spirit. The child could not or did not speak, whatever happened to him, he was still silent.

When people can speak of their troubles of soul, when they can tell you their grief of heart, and ask your prayers, you can get on with them. But here was one who could not speak, yet there was the devil rending and tearing him. It was a horrible case, yet the failure did not lie in the child, it lay mainly, as the Savior put it, in the disciples’ want of faith—“Why could not we cast him out?” “Because of your unbelief.”

You see, the want of faith breaks the connection between us and Christ. We are like the telegraphic wire, which can convey the message as long as the electricity can travel along it, but if you break the connection, it is useless. Faith is our connection with Christ, break the connection, and then what can we do? It is by faith that God works in us and through us, but if unbelief comes in, we are unfit for Him to work with us. Would you have God to bless the man who will not believe in Him? Would you have God to set His seal to the works of the unbelieving? That cannot be.

The first condition of success in any work for God must be hearty faith in the God for whom we are working. “Trust me,” says He, “and I will do anything for you.” If we distrust Him, what can happen to us but what happened to the children of Israel whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?

Now, you know that even the body of a child of God is precious in His sight, for there is faith in him, and he is precious in the sight of the Lord, but as for those who have no faith, Paul calls their bodies carcasses! “Whose carcasses fell in the wilderness.” If you have no faith in God, why, what are you? Like brute beasts—“carcasses.” But faith gives God somewhat of His due, it trusts Him, and God says, “I will never let you trust Me beyond what I will do for you. If you trust Me, I will be as good as your faith.” Would you have Him change a condition which is so natural, so proper, so beneficial for ourselves? O brethren, we shall do great things when God gives us more faith!

Looking now upon the condition of our times, and upon the work allotted to each one of us, I feel that what we want is more faith. Never mind how firmly fixed are the mountains of iniquity, they must move if faith is strong. Never mind how deep have gone the root of the sycamore tree, it shall be plucked up by its roots, if faith is strong. O brethren, we do not half believe! Drive the sword in up to the hilt. Believe in God to the uttermost, dare and venture, and yet find no daring and no venturing in it, as you simply trust your God as a child trusts his father. Many of us must feel, brethren, that we have often failed because of our unbelief.

I must not dwell longer on that point because I want you to notice that the Savior added that, in some cases, *faith must rise to prayer*, and must manifest itself mainly by prayer, or else it will do nothing. I am afraid that these disciples were so satisfied with their commission, their qualifications, and with what they had already done, that they proceeded to work upon this epileptic child without prayer. The Savior says, “This kind—this sort of devil—this peculiarly furious kind of demon—will not go out by the exercise of ordinary faith. It must be faith that rises into prayer.”

You will frequently meet with persons to whom you desire to be blessed, but you never will be blessed to them till first of all you pray for them, and it may be that you will have to pray long and earnestly, and that the praying will have to rise to wrestling, and the wrestling may have to be continued all night, as in the case of Jacob, and you may have to go to God as often as the importunate widow went to the unjust judge. It may be that there are cases in which God will not yield to your faith until your faith works in prayer, and then, when prayer has wrought to its utmost, you shall get the blessing!

I think that I can understand some of God's reasons for acting thus. First, He wants to make us see the greatness of the mercy, so He occupies our thoughts with the greatness of the distress that needs to be relieved, and with this impossibility of that distress being relieved except by His own power and Godhead. That experience does us good, dear friends, does it not? It makes us feel that the mercy, when it does come, will be remarkably precious to us.

The Lord intends also to excite our desires, and that, likewise, does us good. To be all aglow with holy desires is, in itself, a healthy exercise. Then the Lord means to create in us unity of action. One brother finds that he cannot get on alone, so he will call in another to help him in prayer, and much holy united supplication will be called forth by the very desperateness of the case which cannot be met by simple faith, or even by the prayer of one. Let us always seek the united prayers of many brethren and sisters.

You remember that man who was carried by four, and let down from the roof into Christ's presence? Oh, I wish that in your houses, brethren, you met frequently, in twos and threes, for united prayer! I should like to hear of little bands formed of Christian men and women, who pledged themselves to pray, four at a time, for somebody possessed by a devil of the kind that will not go out by ordinary means, and must be ejected by four of you.

Get together and say to yourselves, "We will not rest until this soul, and that soul, shall have the devil cast out, and shall sit, clothed, and in their right mind, at Jesus Christ's feet." "This kind"—these certain kinds of devils are not to be driven out, except by special, importunate, continued, united prayer. They can be cast out if you only believe and pray, there is never a devil but will have to go, if you have faith enough and prayer enough to drive him out.

But then my text says, "*By prayer and fasting.*" Our Lord Jesus Christ never made much of fasting. He very seldom spoke about it, and when the Pharisees exaggerated it, He generally put them off by telling them that the time had not come for His disciples to fast because the Bridegroom was still with them, and while He was with them their days were to be days of joy.

But still, Holy Scripture does speak of fasting, in certain cases it advises fasting, and there were godly men and godly women, such as Anna, the prophetess, who "served God with fastings and prayer night and day." I do not mean to spiritualize this away. I believe, literally, that some of you would be a great deal the better if you did occasionally have a whole day of fasting and prayer. There is a lightness that comes over the frame, especially of bulky people like myself, we begin to feel ourselves quite light and ethereal.

I remember one day of fasting and prayer in which I realized to myself, spiritually, the meaning of a Popish picture, which I have sometimes seen, of a saint floating in the air. Well, that, of course, was impossible, and I do not suppose that, when the picture was painted, it was believed in its literal sense, but there is a lightness, an elevation of the spirit above the flesh, that will come over you after some hours of waiting upon God in fasting and prayer. I can advise brethren sometimes to try it, it will be good for their health, and it certainly will not harm them.

If we only ate about half what is ordinarily eaten, we would probably all of us be in better health, and if, occasionally, we put ourselves on short commons, not because there is any virtue in that, but in order to get our brains more clear, and to help our hearts to rest more fully upon the Savior, we should find that prayer and fasting have great power.

But I will take the fasting in another sense, for I believe that this also is what is meant by our Lord Jesus. Suppose that we have such cases as these to pray for, a church full of discord, a nation or an

individual full of sin. We might say to one another, “We will appoint such-and-such a time for prayer.” Fast or not, according as your body would be the better or the worse for it. To some, it would be mischievous and injurious to fast, but say to yourselves, “We are going to take a whole day to ourselves. Two or three of us have agreed to devote an evening, or a whole night if it is a hard case, and we are going to meet together for no purpose but just to pray about that one matter, and if that does not do, we will meet again.”

I have often heard of instances in which persons who knew that they were thus made especially the object of some remarkable occasions of prayer, have been impressed by the fact, or if not by the fact, yet the outcome of that special, particular, marked season of prayer has been that, before long, they have been brought to Christ. There is a kind of devil that will not go out by ordinary prayer, there must be added to that pleading something by which our zeal shall be yet further increased, there must be “prayer and fasting.”

I think also that I may spiritualize this expression now, and say that, when your mind gets into such a condition that you begin to sorrow over a lost soul, when you realize the meaning of that agonizing cry of Jeremiah, “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!”—it is then that the devil will have to go.

When your soul is clothed in sackcloth and ashes, and you go mourning, without the light of the sun, saying, “I could die rather than that soul should die, I could wish myself accursed rather than that soul were accursed, I put myself in the dust before God, even in the dust of self-abasement on account of that soul, that I may win it to Christ,” then that sort of devil will have to go out. Starving him out by starving yourself, and making your own spirit wretched and miserable for the poor sinner’s sake, you will make that devil find the person untenable any longer as a lodging place.

Permit me to say just one thing more. I believe that the devil of drunkenness will not go out of some men, unless some of you Christian people, who pray for them, and talk with them, will practice fasting in the matter of total abstinence. I do mean this, not that it is wrong for you to take what you do take, but that there are some souls that you cannot win unless you say to them, “For your sakes we are going to give up what might be lawful to us, that we may save you from the public house and all its temptations. Come, Jack, I intend to take the pledge, I never was drunk, and probably never shall be, but I will sign the pledge for your sake.”

There are some devils that will not go out till you act like that, and brothers, we ought to do anything that may result in the saving of a soul. We ought to deny ourselves anything of which we can deny ourselves, if it be necessary to bring one single person to the cross of Christ. Let us see to it that we are quite clear in this matter, for there are still many devils that will not go out without prayer and fasting.

Well then, say, “I will not fast to please the devil, or to please other people, but I will fast to spite the devil, and to get him out of that man. I will fast from anything so that I may but bring him to the feet of Jesus, that he may be saved.” We who love the Lord are, I trust, all agreed on that matter, that no cost on our part should be spared to win a soul from the dominion of Satan, and bring him into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

O you who are not saved, see how concerned we are about you! It seems nothing to you to lose your souls, but it seems everything to us, and it *was* everything to Christ. You would not suffer even a little self-denial that you might be saved, yet Christ died—so highly did He value the souls of sinners—rather than that you should perish. Oh, may that love of His make you begin to love yourselves so as to trust Him, and love Him, and find in Him eternal life! God bless you, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

MARK 9:2-29

Verses 2-4. *And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceedingly white as snow; such as no fuller on earth can whiten them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus.*

In the midst of all His sorrow and humiliation, our Lord lets out some gleams of His glory, to remind us who He was even while He was here in the depths of His grief. He was still none other than the all-glorious Lord of heaven and earth, whose raiment, if He chose to make them so, would be whiter than snow, and brighter than the sun. Let us think of Him with great love and gratitude as we see what glory He willingly laid aside for our sakes, and see how low He stooped who was in Himself immeasurably high.

5-6. *And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid.*

Peter had enough wit left to wish to stay where he was, and sometimes, when we are with our Lord in the mount, we can only say, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us stay where we are! Let our union and communion with Yourself continue for evermore!”

7-8. *And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.*

Moses is gone, and Elias is gone, but Jesus remains, and it is much the same with us now, and we are quite content that all others should go that we may have “Jesus only.” If He be with us, we have the best company in the world.

9-10. *And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.*

You see the great modesty and patience of our Lord. Though these three favored apostles might see His glory, and afterwards bear witness concerning it, yet for the time being they must hold their tongues. All this glory, and only three men to see it, and these three must be quite silent! Our Lord seeks not honor from men, neither ought we to do so. His mind was even then occupied with thoughts of His great sacrifice. When He spoke to Moses and Elias, His theme was, “His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem,” and when He spoke with these three eyewitnesses of His majesty, the subject of His converse was His own death and resurrection. That was the object on which His heart’s affection was set.

11-13. *And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.*

Notice that, even when our Savior was answering His disciples’ question about Elias and John, the ruling passion being strong upon Him, He introduced into that answer something about His own death. That subject is always before His eye, He never forgets it, He is in a sense undergoing His passion even as He descends the mount of transfiguration.

14. *And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them.*

What a descent for Christ, from the peace and quiet of the hill of communion with the glorified, to the noise and tumult of a surging multitude, and the mocking question of the jeering scribes!

15. *And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him.*

I think there must be some truth in the common tradition that the face of our Lord Jesus still shone with the light of the transfiguration. It does appear so to me from these words, “All the people, when

they beheld him, were greatly amazed.” Surely, it was not an amazement at the mere fact of seeing Him whom they had so often seen, but His face, I doubt not, glowed as the face of Moses did when he came down from the mount. Only observe that, when the face of Moses burned with the reflected glory of God’s presence, the people could not bear to look upon him, but when the face of Christ shone with supernatural splendor, they “were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him.” There is an attractive glory about the Christ of God. Oh, for such a sight of His face at this moment that we should all run to Him, and salute Him!

16. *And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them?*

There had been a skirmish between the scribes and the disciples of Christ, and the scribes were winning the day, but when the Captain had come, the tide of battle was soon turned.

17-18. *And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.*

It was an aggravated case of epilepsy, attended with possession by an evil spirit. The disciples could not cast out this devil, and the scribes had therefore attacked their faith in the Master Himself while He was away.

19. *He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.*

Unbelief is a great trouble to Christ. I never read that He said to the poor or to the sick, “How long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer with you?” I never read that He expressed any weariness of human ignorance, or scarcely even of human sin, but when it is a matter of unbelief, then it stings Him, and He cries, “O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I bear with you? Bring Him to Me.”

20-21. *And they brought him to him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.*

And having begun with that sorrowful subject, the father, with the painful eloquence of pity, went on to tell the tale of woe—

22. *And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.*

Here was unbelief, it is true, but there was with it a pitying entreaty that meant more faith than it could express. Men do not usually beg where they expect nothing, and they do not make pitiful entreaties with tears unless they have some hope. Even though it was almost covered up, still the Savior fastened on that one utterance of unbelief, “if.”

23. *Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.*

“It is not, ‘If I can,’ but ‘If thou canst.’”

24. *And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*

There was faith, even though it was mixed with unbelief. It was a faith that made him pray, as I have already told you, and the Lord Jesus Christ found out where the faith was. He had, as it were, broken the great black lump of dead coal that looked to be nothing but unbelief, and there was the living light of faith burning in the very center of it.

25. *When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.*

That is Christ’s way of curing. Our Lord does not save sinners as some say that He does, just for a short time, and then let His work all grumble back to nothingness. This would be unworthy of Himself, and unworthy of that gracious Spirit by whom He works. No, if He casts out a devil, he shall enter no more into the one he formerly tormented.

26. *And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead.*

As old Thomas Fuller says, the devil knew that he had to go out, so, like a bad tenant, he did all the mischief he could before he left. Satan often acts in this fashion, just when Christ has come to cast him out, he drives the poor soul into deeper despair, and perhaps into greater sin than he ever fell into in all his life.

27. *But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.*

He was not dead, though many thought he was, and said so. Christ does not cure and then kill, He cures so that we shall never die. No, no, poor sinner, the last pangs of despair shall not destroy you, the fiercest, bitterest assaults of Satan shall not cause you to die, Christ will take you by the hand, and you shall arise.

28-29. *And when He had come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said to them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*

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